

## CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

### **Introduction:**

Downside School takes great pride in the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a concern or complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure.

### **Confidentiality:**

A Complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited, as far as is possible, to the Head Master and those directly involved. The Chair of Governors may also need to be informed. It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children.

We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. Whenever possible parents will be kept informed if this is the case.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints may not be pursued. Action which needs to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of complaints will be handled confidentially within the school.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents have a complaint, it may be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue, who can therefore remedy the complaint quickly. However, parents may prefer to take the matter to a more senior member of staff, for example, the Director of Studies, the Director of Pastoral Care, the Deputy Head Master or the Head Master.

Complaints made directly to the Head Master will usually be referred to the relevant teacher, or the member of staff most closely concerned with the issue, unless the Head Master deems it appropriate for him to deal with the matter personally.

The teacher or appropriate member of staff will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 7 working days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Every effort will be made to resolve the matter of the complaint at the informal stage rather than allowing it to pass on to more formal procedures.

Any complaint against the Headmaster should be made directly to the Chair of Governors at the address set out below. He will be responsible for investigating the complaint appropriately, responding to the complainant in line with the procedures above and keeping his own record of any such complaints.

## **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head Master. The Head Master will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

The Head Master will contact or arrange to meet the parents concerned, normally within 7 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Head Master to carry out further investigation or to refer the matter to the Chair of Governors.

The Head Master will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint for at least three years.

The Head Master will provide Ofsted and ISI (Independent Schools' Inspectorate), if requested, with a written record of all complaints made during a specified period, and action which was taken as a result of each complaint.

Once the Head Master is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head Master will also give reasons for his decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

## **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. Where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one person will be independent of the management and the running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors, who on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days.

If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 7 working days prior to the hearing.

The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.

Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it will complete within 14 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents (where possible, a copy will also be sent by e-mail) informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 28 days of having received the complaint. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and any recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head Master, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School keeps a written record of all complaints and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a Panel Hearing. A record of complaints is kept for at least 3 years.

All correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 162A of the 2002 Act, as amended, requests access to them, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Should any aspect of the complaints' procedure remain unresolved, it is possible for parents to bring such matters to the attention of Ofsted and/or the Independent Schools' Inspectorate.

These organisations may be contacted at:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)

Chair of Governors  
Abbot Aiden Bellenger  
Downside Abbey  
Stratton-on-the-Fosse  
Radstock  
Bath BA3 4RH

Policy reviewed August 2011 and confirmed as the current Policy

**Dom Leo Maidlow Davis**